

What is claimed:

- 1 1. A method of handling time-sensitive messages, comprising steps of:  
2 marking a message as time-sensitive;  
3 sending the marked message to a recipient; and  
4 automatically receiving a reply from the recipient regarding the marked message within a  
5 time period of the time-sensitivity of the marked message.
- 1 2. The method according to Claim 1, wherein the marking step further comprises indicating  
2 whether snoozing is allowed by the recipient for this message.
- 1 3. The method according to Claim 1, wherein the marking step further comprises indicating  
2 an ending time for the time period of the time-sensitivity of the message.
- 1 4. The method according to Claim 3, wherein the marking step further comprises indicating a  
2 starting time for the time period of the time-sensitivity of the message.
- 1 5. The method according to Claim 1, further comprising the steps of:  
2 receiving the marked message at a computing device of the recipient;  
3 determining whether the time period of the time-sensitivity of the received message has  
4 been reached; and  
5 requiring the received message to be rendered to the recipient if so.

1 6. The method according to Claim 5, further comprising the step of requiring the recipient to  
2 respond to the rendered message.

1 7. A method of improving electronic communications, comprising steps of:  
2 receiving a plurality of electronic messages by a recipient to whom the electronic messages  
3 are addressed; and  
4 evaluating the received electronic messages for processing, further comprising steps of:  
5 determining whether a selected one of the received electronic messages is time-  
6 sensitive; and  
7 requiring the selected one to be rendered to the recipient if so.

1 8. The method according to Claim 7, wherein the evaluating step further comprises the step  
2 of:  
3 suppressing the requiring step unless a time period of the time-sensitivity has been  
4 reached.

1 9. The method according to Claim 7, further comprising the steps of:  
2 determining, when the selected one is time-sensitive and a time period of the time-  
3 sensitivity has been reached, whether snoozing is allowed for the selected one; and  
4 if so, delaying the requiring step until a later time, wherein the later time is within the time  
5 period of the time-sensitivity.

1 10. The method according to Claim 7, wherein the evaluating step further comprises the step  
2 of:  
3 determining, when the selected one is time-sensitive and the time period of the time-  
4 sensitivity has been reached, whether snoozing is allowed for the selected one; and  
5 if so, allowing the recipient to suppress the requiring step only while (1) a starting time of  
6 the time period has been reached but (2) an ending time of the time period has not been reached.

1 11. The method according to Claim 7, further comprising the steps of:  
2 requiring the recipient to create a response to the rendered selected one; and  
3 sending the response to a sender of the rendered selected one.

1 12. The method according to Claim 7, further comprising the step of determining whether  
2 processing of the rendered selected one is complete, and if not, remembering the rendered  
3 selected one for subsequent evaluation at a later time, wherein the later time is within the time  
4 period of the time-sensitivity.

1 13. The method according to Claim 7, wherein the requiring step is suppressed unless (1) a  
2 starting time of a time period of the time-sensitivity has been reached and (2) an ending time of  
3 the time period of the time-sensitivity has not been reached.

1 14. The method according to Claim 7, wherein the electronic messages are e-mail messages.

1 15. The method according to Claim 7, wherein the electronic messages are electronic  
2 calendar events.

1 16. The method according to Claim 7, wherein the electronic messages are to-do items.

1 17. The method according to Claim 7, further comprising the steps of:  
2 determining, when the selected one is time-sensitive and a time period of the time-  
3 sensitivity is approaching or has been reached, whether a hierarchy of event notification  
4 techniques has been defined for various intervals of time-sensitivity, and if so, selecting a  
5 notification technique which corresponds to an amount of time in the time period in addition to or  
6 instead of the step of requiring the selected one to be rendered to the recipient.

1 18. A system for handling time-sensitive messages, comprising:  
2 means for marking a message as time-sensitive;  
3 means for sending the marked message to a recipient; and  
4 means for automatically receiving a reply from the recipient regarding the marked message  
5 within a time period of the time-sensitivity of the marked message.

1 19. The system according to Claim 18, wherein the marking means further comprises means  
2 for indicating an ending time for the time period of the time-sensitivity of the message.

1 20. A system for improving electronic communications, comprising:

2 means for receiving a plurality of electronic messages by a recipient to whom the  
3 electronic messages are addressed;

4 means for determining whether a selected one of the received electronic messages is time-  
5 sensitive, and if so, whether a time period of the time-sensitivity has been reached; and

6 means for requiring the selected one to be rendered to the recipient if so.

1 21. The system according to Claim 20, wherein the means for determining further comprises  
2 means for determining whether the time period of the time-sensitivity has been exceeded; and  
3 wherein the means for requiring is suppressed if the time period of the time-sensitivity has been  
4 exceeded.

1 22. A computer program product for handling time-sensitive messages, the computer program  
2 product embodied on one or more computer-readable media and comprising:

3 computer-readable program code means for marking a message as time-sensitive;

4 computer-readable program code means for sending the marked message to a recipient;

5 and

6 computer-readable program code means for automatically receiving a reply from the  
7 recipient regarding the marked message within a time period of the time-sensitivity of the marked  
8 message.

1 23. The computer program product according to Claim 22, wherein the computer-readable  
2 program code means for marking further comprises computer-readable program code means for

3 indicating an ending time for the time period of the time-sensitivity of the message.

1 24. A computer program product for improving electronic communications, the computer  
2 program product embodied on one or more computer-readable media and comprising:  
3 computer-readable program code means for receiving a plurality of electronic messages by  
4 a recipient to whom the electronic messages are addressed;  
5 computer-readable program code means for determining whether a selected one of the  
6 received electronic messages is time-sensitive, and if so, whether a time period of the time-  
7 sensitivity has been reached; and  
8 computer-readable program code means for requiring the selected one to be rendered to  
9 the recipient if so.

1 25. The computer program product according to Claim 24, wherein the computer-readable  
2 program code means for determining further comprises computer-readable program code means  
3 for determining whether the time period of the time-sensitivity has been exceeded; and wherein  
4 the computer-readable program code means for requiring is suppressed if the time period of the  
5 time-sensitivity has been exceeded.